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SUBJECT: LEBANON: HIZBALLAH WAITING FOR MARCH 14 TO SHIFT
ON CABINET AND ELECTORAL LAW

Classified By: CDA Michele J. Sison for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (S) A Hizballah security official told an interlocutor from the office of the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon that electoral law is all that remains to be discussed regarding Lebanon's political impasse. The Hizballah official claims the majority and opposition have agreed on Lebanese Armed Forces Commander Michel Sleiman as the consensus presidential candidate, and March 14 will soon accept the 10-10-10 cabinet formation supported by the opposition. The Hizballah official speculated that the security situation will be "quiet for the coming period." He also hinted at progress in the coming months in negotiations over the prisoners' swap between Israel and Hizballa. End summary.

FULL SUPPORT FOR BERRI INITIATIVE

2. (S) Diego Zorrilla (please protect), a contact at the office of the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL) briefed PolOff on his April 2 meeting with Hizballah security official Wafiq Safa, who acts as Hizballah's liaison to all of Lebanon's security services. With the post of Special Coordinator vacant since Geir Pederson departed in February, Zorrilla and others on the UNSCOL staff are maintaining the office's contacts with Safa, their normal Hizballah interlocutor. A reportedly relaxed Safa expressed Hizballah's full support for parliament Speaker Nabih Berri's attempt to renew the 2006 National Dialogue. (Note: It seems Berri was shopping the idea around to secure support before pushing for it with March 14. Speaking on April 2, Safa said the initiative would not be formally proposed for another week to ten days. Berri publicly announced it had Syrian support following his April 7 visit to Damascus. End note.)

ELECTORAL LAW ONLY OPEN ISSUE

3. (S) According to Zorrilla, Safa said that the electoral law remains the only contentious issue between the majority and the opposition that is holding up the presidential election. He said that March 14 and March 8 have agreed on Lebanese Armed Forces Commander Michel Sleiman's candidacy and that the 10-10-10 cabinet formation "is by now clear." (Note: During an April 1 conversation with UNSCOL representatives, we were told that Hizballah's main demand is

for the opposition to have a blocking third in the cabinet, or at a minimum, a 10-10-10 split. According to UNSCOL, all of the other conditions placed upon March 14 before agreeing to elect a president have been set by Free Patriotic Movement Michel Aoun or Berri, not by them, although Hizballah does benefit from these demands. End note.)

¶4. (S) Safa reportedly believes that Druze leader Walid Jumblatt will be able to bring the resisting March 14 leaders on board. Safa rationalized that the majority would become increasingly amenable to the opposition's demands because March 14 leaders had been waiting for the U.S. to attack Iran or for an Israeli-Syrian war. They have now realized, however, that neither will happen so they will shift to a position more accommodating to Hizballah.

AOUN REMAINS OUR MOUTHPIECE

¶5. (S) Commenting on March 8's recent organizational efforts mimicking those of March 14 (to include forming a secretariat and holding a conference), Safa assured his UN contact that Aoun remains the representative of the opposition in any negotiations with March 14 to resolve the political impasse, although a March 8 spokesman will be appointed.

STABILITY IN THE COMING PERIOD

¶6. (S) According to Zorrilla, Safa predicted the security situation will be quiet for the coming period. He claimed it is calm in the south and that Hizballah wants stability for the time being.

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HIZBALLAH PRISONERS' SWAP

¶7. (C) Hizballah is expecting progress will be made in the coming months in its negotiations over a prisoners swap between Israel and Hizballah. Safa reported that previously Israel had been opposing Hizballah's demands for prisoner releases, but now he is optimistic that progress will be made in the coming months or by the end of the year (NFI).

COMMENT

¶8. (S) Safa's prediction of calm for the foreseeable future tracks with what we are hearing from other sources that Hizballah is not ready to provoke a confrontation with Israel. We do not believe March 14 is near to accepting a 10-10-10 cabinet. With majority leader Saad Hariri still abroad, discussions among March 14 leaders are not occurring on this and other key issues.

SISON